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ABSTRACT

To investigate the attributes associated with "quality," ten junior novels were rated by eleven raters for theme, characterization, plot, structure, style, setting, literary devices, readability, within-sentence modification, between-sentence modification, and overall quality. Results of factor and regression analyses indicated that quality in a junior novel is basically a function of the author's style, plot, structure, setting, and theme. Characterization, literary devices, and within- and between-sentence modification were not so strongly associated with differences in overall quality. (AA)

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Literary Characteristics Which Constitute "Quality" in the Junior Novel: An Empirical Approach

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What is good literature? Are the characteristics that make literature good or poor in one genre the same characteristics that affect quality in another genre? These are questions that, when answered, will greatly aid teachers, for once it is known what makes the "good" poem, the "good" short story, the "good" junior novel, then teachers will have some clear guidelines concerning what to teach when dealing with these types of literature. Teachers will then know that the poem is a good vehicle with which to exemplify literary characteristics X and Y; the junior novel is a good vehicle for teaching characteristics Y and Z, and so on.

Unfortunately there has been no empirical research aimed at identifying significant literary traits across genre or for any one type of literature. This study was an attempt to take the first empirical step in that direction. The researchers attempted to answer the basic question, "What are the literary characteristics which constitute 'good literature' within the genre of the junior novel?"

Literary Characteristics

A review of current opinion on the judging of literary quality revealed that the number of traits associated with good literature has almost a one to one relationship with the number of people who have opinions. Probably the most frequently mentioned attributes are:

1. THEME
2. CHARACTERISTICS
3. PLOT
4. STRUCTURE
5. STYLE

For operational definitions of the above mentioned traits, the researchers used the descriptions given by Dunning and Howes (1975, pp. 205-206).

A review of high school literature texts revealed two more variables that are traditionally associated with quality of literature:

6. SETTING
7. LITERARY DEVICES

The seven above mentioned characteristics seemed to adequately represent the more general variables associated with quality of literature for novels. The researchers also attempted to include variables that pertained to particular syntactic and semantic aspects of an author's writing. To represent those aspects the researchers chose the following variables:

8. READABILITY
9. WITHIN SENTENCE MODIFICATION (WSM)
10. BETWEEN SENTENCE MODIFICATION (BSM)

Readability was defined as the difficulty of a book as measured by the Fry (1968) formula. WITHIN SENTENCE MODIFICATION is the extent and depth to which clauses, phrases and single words are used as modifiers within a sentence. BETWEEN SENTENCE MODIFICATIONS is the extent and depth to which sentences within a paragraph act as modifiers of the topic sentence. WSM and BSM have been shown to be significant predictors of composition quality (DiStefano and Marzano, 1976) and of paragraph readability (Marzano, 1976). These measures have also been postulated by Christensen (1963) to quantify elements which are basic to quality in professional writing.

The Sample and Procedure

Ten books from the domain of the junior novel were selected for analysis. They were:

Man Without A Face

Sounder

Shadow of a Bull

Don't Play Dead Until You Have To

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh

I'll Get There but it Better Be Worth the Trip

Pigman

Enchantress From the Stars

Soul Brother and Sister Lou

That Was Then, This Is Now

Eleven raters independently rated the books on OVERALL QUALITY using a Likert type rating. The raters then calculated measures 8-10 for each book and rated each book on measures 1-7 (Likert Scale). The raters waited two weeks between the time they assigned quality ratings and the time they assigned ratings for measures 1-7. This was to assure some independence between OVERALL QUALITY and the other measures. Prior to assigning values for measures 1-7 the raters were trained as to the operational definitions of the qualities being measured and the guidelines for assigning values for each measure. For example, for THEME the raters were instructed to answer the following questions as a guide to assigning weights on the Likert scale.

a. Is the theme clear? Does it dominate the book and seem didactic?

b. Is the theme important--appropriate to young people, to society's values, worth thinking about?

c. Does the theme offer the reader an honest perspective on the values of human experience?

To insure independence among measures 1-7 all books were rated on one measure before the next measure was calculated. After all ratings were made the average reliability for each rater (Winer, 1971, pp. 283-296)

was calculated on each measure along with the reliability of the combined ratings for each measure (eleven ratings combined for each measure). Those reliabilities are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Average and Combined Ratings For Each Measure

Measure	Average Reliabilities for One Rater	Combined Reliability for 11 Raters
THEME	.40	.83
CHARACTERIZATION	.44	.89
PLOT	.55	.91
STRUCTURE	.42	.85
STYLE	.58	.92
SETTING	.59	.92
LIT DEVICES	.59	.94
READABILITY	.58	.94
WSM	.58	.93
BSM	.60	.95
OVERALL QUALITY	.61	.96

As is evidenced by Table 1, when all eleven ratings, for any given book on any given measure, are considered as a composite rating the

reliability of that rating is very high--usually above .90. This is a statistical phenomenon. The reliability of a composite rating will increase as one adds raters. The average rating for individual raters is probably the most interesting aspect of Table 1. Considering the unreliabibility generally associated with individual ratings (Diederich, 1961; Follman and Anderson, 1967), the average ratings reported for this study are quite high. They are high enough, in fact, that the researchers decided to consider each rating as an independent observation rather than combine ratings for a given measure and a given book. This is tantamount to having eleven independent observations for each book on each measure. Given the ten books, the researchers were able to analyze each measure on the basis of 110 observations. This greatly increased the scope of statistical analyses that could be performed.

Analysis of the Data

The data was analyzed in three ways:

1. one way ANOVAs were conducted using the books as the independent variable and measures 1-10 and QUALITY as the dependent variables
2. bivariate and multiple regression analyses were performed using measures 1-10 as predictors and OVERALL QUALITY as the criterion.
3. a principal factor--factor analysis (Harman, 1967) with a varimax rotation was conducted using OVERALL QUALITY and measures 1-10.

The ANOVA was used to calculate the average and composite reliabilities for the measures (Winer, 1971) and to answer the following research question:

1. Is there a significant (.05) difference among the books on OVERALL QUALITY and the 10 measures?

The factor analysis was used to answer the question:

2. What do the ten indices measure in common with one another and with OVERALL QUALITY?

The regression analyses were used to answer the questions:

3. Which measures have the strongest relationship with OVERALL QUALITY?
4. What is the extent of interrelationships among the ten measures?

Results and Discussion

The ANOVAs using QUALITY and the ten indices as dependent measures showed significant differences among means for all dependent measures. Thus the answer to the first research question was affirmative--there is a difference on all measures among the ten books. Since the ANOVA process tests the null hypotheses that the means for the books are equal, the reliabilities for the measures used to answer research question 1 are those for the combined ratings (see Table 1). Those reliabilities are all very high. Thus, the researchers concluded that the ten books were a random sample,[1] from the domain of the junior novel, that was representative of truly different levels for the literary characteristics measured by the ten indices and OVERALL QUALITY. This, of course, greatly increased the external validity of the findings on research questions 2-4.

[1]Because the books were a sample from the domain of the junior novel, a random effects model was used for the ANOVAs.

The principal factor[2]--factor analysis with varimax rotation (question 2) produced two very clear factors. The loadings for the rotated factors are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Varimax Rotated Factors

Measure	I	II
OVERALL QUALITY	.92	-.16
READABILITY	-.17	.76
WSM	-.42	.45
SETTING	.77	.02
PLOT	.79	-.27
CHARACTERIZATION	.59	-.29
THEME	.69	-.08
LIT DEV	.82	-.06
STRUCTURE	.79	-.19
STYLE	.89	.01
BSM	.07	.73
Eigenvalues	5.51	1.30
% of Variance	50.1%	11.8%

[2]Because each rating was considered an observation, a principal factor rather than principal component factor analysis was used to control for the unreliability of the individual ratings.

OVERALL QUALITY, SETTING, PLOT, CHARACTERIZATION, THEME, LIT DEV, STRUCTURE and STYLE all loaded quite heavily (higher than .50) on the first factor (column I). READABILITY, WSM and BSM loaded heavily on the second factor. This indicates that WSM, BSM and READABILITY all measure one characteristic in common and the other indices measure something else in common--something that is different from what is measured by WSM, BSM and READABILITY. The researchers concluded that within/between sentence modification and readability have little to do with the quality of a junior novel. This is not to say that authors of the junior novel do not use a great deal of within and between sentence modification. Indeed, the mean for WSM was 2.7 and for BSM 3.1. These averages are very high when compared with the writing of high schoolers and adults across the nation (Marzano and DiStefano, 1976). The fact that WSM and BSM do not measure the same trait (for junior novels) as OVERALL QUALITY but have high means, indicates that authors of the junior novel are all adept at using within and between sentence modification but the extent to which those skilled writers use modification does not enhance or detract from the quality of the novel. The mean for READABILITY was 6.7. Considering that the books were written for a junior high school audience, this indicates that the authors were able to write high quality stories and still keep the language and syntax at an understandable level.

The bivariate regression analyses (questions 3 and 4) using OVERALL QUALITY as the criterion and the ten measures as predictors produced the results summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Bivariate Regression: QUALITY as Criterion

Predictor	beta-weight	probability
READABILITY	-.26	.009
WSM	-.43	.001
SETTING	.71	.000
PLOT	.78	.000
CHAR	.55	.000
THEME	.63	.000
LIT DEV	.74	.000
STRUCTURE	.75	.000
STYLE	.81	.000
BSM	-.08	.402

Since beta-weights in a bivariate regression analysis are equal to the correlations between predictor and predicted, the second column of Table 3 can be used to answer research question 3, which measures have the strongest relationship with OVERALL QUALITY? In rank order of their strength of positive relationship with quality, the measures are:

STYLE	.81
PLOT	.78
STRUCTURE	.75
LIT DEV	.74
SETTING	.71
THEME	.63
CHAR	.55

BSM	-.08
READ	-.26
WSM	-.43

This can be interpreted as a hierarchy of literary traits which work together to constitute good quality in the junior novel.

A multiple correlation was calculated among QUALITY and the ten measures. That multiple R was .92. This means that the ten measures account for 84% (R^2) of the variance in OVERALL QUALITY. Roughly speaking this indicates that the ten measures used in the study account for 84% of whatever determines quality in the junior novel.

The multiple regression analysis also produced information useful in answering research question 4 concerning the interrelationship among the ten measures. When entered into a multiple regression equation with OVERALL QUALITY as the criterion, only five out of the ten measures were significant predictors of quality. Those measures were STYLE, PLOT, SETTING, THEME and STRUCTURE. A logical question might be, how can a measure be a significant predictor ofQUALITY in a bivariate regression analysis yet not be a significant predictor in a multiple regression analysis? The explanation rests in the interrelationship or collinearity among predictors. CHARACTERIZATION was not a significant predictor in the multiple regression analysis because it was highly correlated (.53) with STYLE. Hence, when STYLE was entered into the equation it "used up," so to speak, most of the predictive power that CHARACTERIZATION possessed. LITERARY DEVICES was not a significant predictor in the multiple regression equation because it had high correlation with SETTING, PLOT, STRUCTURE and STYLE (.57, .64, .64, .73 respectively).

READABILITY, WSM, and BSM were highly intercorrelated and also had weaker relationships with the criterion. 12

The results of the multiple regression analysis somewhat change the interpretation of the hierarchy of literary qualities mentioned previously. Since CHARACTERIZATION and LITERARY DEVICES measure the same traits as other measures, they should probably be dropped from the hierarchy. READABILITY, WSM and BSM also measure a common trait--a trait which is not related to quality at the junior novel level. Hence, the hierarchy of literary characteristics in their order of importance is:

STYLE

PLOT

STRUCTURE

SETTING

THEME

When only these measures are entered in a multiple regression equation with QUALITY, the multiple R is .86.

Implications

The results of the study were surprisingly clear cut and interpretable. Quality in the junior novel is basically a function of the author's style, plot, structure, setting and theme. For the teacher this means that when dealing with the junior novel the above mentioned literary characteristics are those that should be stressed because good vs. poor junior novels are differentiated in the extent to which style, plot, structure, setting and theme are developed. The negative counterpart of this is that the junior novel is a poor vehicle with which to teach literary devices, characterization and the different ways a writer can use modification within and between sentences. These are not distinguishing factors within the realm of the junior novel.

Thus, this study has focused the types of instructional goals a

teacher should have when dealing with the junior novel. If all types of literature were analyzed in a fashion analogous to this study, teachers might someday possess clear guidelines regarding which type of literature to use when teaching each type of literary characteristic. This study has provided a straightforward answer for the junior novel. Perhaps future studies will provide the answers for other genre.

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